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SUBJECT Interview with William Webster

JOAN LUNDEN: In the last week there have been four more arrests of people in our country for allegedly spying. The four include a CIA employee and a National Security Agency employee.

The FBI is primarily responsible for catching spies here in the United States. William Webster is Director of the FBI, and he joins me this morning from Washington.

Judge Webster, why are we seeing so many more arrests? Area we getting better at catching spies, or are there just more people out there spying today?

DIRECTOR WILLIAM WEBSTER: Well, I think that's anybody's guess. I think both answers are correct. They're more aggressive today than they were 20 years ago. We think we're better at finding them, identifying them, and taking the appropriate steps to neutralize them.

LUNDEN: The arrests that we've been hearing about have been arrested Americans. We do not hear much about the arrest or the expulsion of foreign nationals who are here in our country, presumably, sometimes masquerading as journalists or diplomats, who are spying. Why can't we do more about that?

DIRECTOR WEBSTER: Well, I think if you looked at the arrests that have taken place in the last five years, to date many of those have been protected by diplomatic immunity. We have interdicted operations, called this to the attention of the State Department. The State Department has taken appropriate steps to expel them. That's all that we can legally do.

We try to bring cases, criminal cases against every

foreign intelligence officer who is not protected by diplomatic immunity.

But that's the principal reason why you don't see spies going to jail. But you've seen more spies going to jail in the last couple of years than at any time since World War II.

LUNDEN: Just this morning on the news we've been hearing reports, apparently, from the Washington Post and out of Israel that an Israeli official has been called home. Can you tell us anything more about that?

DIRECTOR WEBSTER: I don't think I should comment on the political side of that. Our case is as it's been reported in the papers and as reflected in the affidavits for arrest. I'm sure that we will get more information and that the Israeli government will make public its findings.

LUNDEN: Some of the spies, or alleged spies, have been operating not even just for years, but for decades. What is wrong with our internal security system or our procedures that we can't detect these people earlier, before damage is done?

DIRECTOR WEBSTER: That's a good question, and it's one that many people ask, often confusing counterintelligence responsibilities, which is our job to find people engaged in this activity, from the responsibilities of those who have secrets to protect them adequately.

We have too much material that is classified, too many people, over four million people, who have access to classified information. And I believe that this produces a kind of numbness, a sense that it's not all that important.

We need better screening of employees, not only new employees, but periodic random inspections and audits of people with classified information. And we need to take this far more seriously than we have in the past.

And I think that's happening. One of the arrests resulted from an alert employee noticing that one of those recently arrested was going outside his range of responsibility of classified information.

LUNDEN: All right, about several people arrested recently. One alleged spy, Edward Howard, a former CIA employee, has apparently fled the country. And it's happened, apparently, after the FBI questioned him just a few days before. How could that happen? How could he have slipped out of the fingers of the FBI when he was under suspicion?

DIRECTOR WEBSTER: He was very, very skillful in the

manner in which he did it. We can't always keep our eyes on people that we can't arrest. Our function is to track, and we did our best under the circumstances. But we did not at that time have authorization to make the arrest. However, we were authorized to stay right on top of him.

Naturally, we wish we knew more about it. But we do know a great deal more about it that we can't say at the present time.

But we mustn't confuse operational situations from the overall program, which is operating very effectively in identifying hostile intelligence officers and making it very difficult for them to make contact with Americans who wish to betray their country.

LUNDEN: All right. On that note, the first man ever to be tried for passing secrets to the Soviets, the first FBI man, is Richard Miller. In his recent mistrial, there were some questions raised about him being incompetent. And that raised questions about the FBI, whether you can screen out the incompetents and get rid of them.

How do you respond to all this criticism?

DIRECTOR WEBSTER: Well, I don't think there's been that much criticism. We're talking about one individual who's awaiting trial, and so I can't talk about his case in particular.

We do look for signs of loyalty, and there were no indications of disloyalty.

It's very unfortunate for the intelligence agencies and trusted law enforcement agencies that the morale of the men and women who serve in it not be disrupted by constant suspicion when there is no basis for suspicion.

We do a better job. We try to do a better job. There'll probably be more use of polygraphs and other modern techniques. But it's very important to the country that the focus be on the enemy, and not on those of us responsible for doing our job.

LUNDEN: Judge Webster, thank you very much for being with us this morning.